

FORMATION OF PATTERNS OF INTERACTION BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES IN 2009-2016: THE CASES OF BELARUS AND AZERBAIJAN

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This study is aimed to examine the interaction between the EU and two countries participating in the Eastern Partnership initiative: Azerbaijan and Belarus. These countries have similar characteristics, but the interaction between them and the European Union differs significantly. In the course of the paper, the formation of patterns of interaction is studied and answers to the question about the reasons for the differences in the interaction of these countries with the EU are formulated.

Key words:

Eastern Partnership, EU foreign policy, post-Soviet space, Europeanization.

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INTRODUCTION

The EU's Eastern Partnership Policy, which was launched in 2009, may be seen as a continuation of Eastern Neighborhood Policy, which was created to strengthen cooperation between the EU and its southern and eastern neighbors. Eastern Partnership Policy (EaP) is aimed at "building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased cooperation" [18] and includes Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Belarus, and Azerbaijan. All these countries have different goals and incentives to participate in EaP, but Belarus and Azerbaijan present especially interesting cases for research.

At a first glance, Belarus and Azerbaijan have a lot in common: on the one hand, there are Soviet past and establishment of authoritarian regimes [1], [5]. After the Soviet Union collapsed, political struggle in Belarusian and Azerbaijani elites led to the consolidation of power in the hands of Alexander Lukashenko and Heydar (later his son Ilham) Aliev respectively, both remaining in office up to now. On the other hand, if we look at the interaction of these countries with the EU, we will see that both have weak bilateral relations with the Union: either because of their prioritization of multilateral dimension or as a consequence of the restrictions imposed on them by the EU. Moreover, both countries are unwilling to join the Union in the future. What draws our attention is that Belarus and Azerbaijan, nevertheless, have quite different patterns of interaction when it comes to cooperation with the EU.

If we place these cases under scrutiny, quite numerous peculiarities emerge. In the framework of EaP Belarus does not participate in bilateral projects and is the only participating country which has not signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU. European Union constantly subjects Belarus to sanctions, accusing its government of suppressing opposi-

tion leaders, and virtually freezes high-level cooperation. Belarus, in its turn, shapes its foreign policy towards the EU in accordance with its strategic interests, using it as a 'bargaining tool' with Russia [11, 156]. Contrary to that, Azerbaijan – EU relations go beyond multilateral track; European Union seems to ignore authoritarian nature of Azerbaijani government and human rights violations, focusing on bilateral technical cooperation. Azerbaijan seeks the recognition of its interests and needs by the EU and openly challenges the lack of equality. This leads us to pose the following questions: why are the EU's actions towards quite similar authoritarian states dramatically different? Why does it impose bans and restrictions on one state and turns a blind eye to the actions of another? And what drives these states to interact with the Union in such different ways?

Thus, our main research question is as follows: what explains the differences in interaction between the EU and Azerbaijan and the EU and Belarus in the framework of Eastern Partnership Policy? In search for the answers, we are going to study factors, influencing the formation of patterns of interaction of both sides – the EU and the partner countries.

On the theoretical level we focus on the causes of difference in the interactions between the EU and third countries. On the empirical basis we dig into the interaction between the EU and Azerbaijan and the EU and Belarus in the framework of Eastern Partnership Policy in 2009 - 2016. The choice of this period is justified by the starting point of EaP in 2009 and considerations of data availability.

The research aims at explaining the causes of difference in interaction between the EU and Azerbaijan and the EU and Belarus. To achieve this goal, we will need to take the following steps. First, to review the literature on the topic of the EU interaction with third countries, and the EU – Azerbaijan and EU – Belarus

relations. Then we will distinguish factors which influence the interaction between the EU and third countries and Azerbaijan and the EU and Belarus in particular and set hypotheses. Then we will trace the development of relations of Azerbaijan and Belarus with the EU and test the hypotheses.

KEY CONCEPTS IN THE STUDIES OF THE EU RELATIONS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

As the EaP initiative is a dimension of the EU's foreign policy, we will first review the literature on the EU relations with third countries and distinguish the existing ways to conceptualize the Union's policies towards its neighbors. Then we will overview factors which may influence the interaction between the EU and third countries. After that the main notions will be operationalized, and hypotheses will be set. Let us now turn to the concepts used to analyze the EU foreign policy.

One of the most prominent and contested concepts is Europeanisation. This notion emerged in the field of EU studies during the 1980s and became widespread in the 1990s. During that time its use was rather inconsistent in terms of uniformity. Noticing this problem, Johan P. Olsen made an attempt to bring manifold meanings of the concept together and to elaborate a descriptive model that would allow using the notion more effectively. In doing so, Olsen distinguishes five types of Europeanisation based on the object of this process: geographical enlargement of the EU, building European institutions at the supra-national level, development of similar institutions at a national level, political unification of Europe, and export of political institutions to other countries [41]. The most interesting form of Europeanisation for our research is export of institutions. Olsen notes, that European institutions may be adopted not because of their attractiveness but also because this process includes transfer of status and power. He also points at the importance of

considering resources involved in the Europeanisation process: both the resources used to promote institutions and to resist democratizing pressure from the EU [41].

However, the application of this concept in contexts other than European was criticized by many scholars, as Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse note [12]. The authors contend that thinking about non-European states in terms of Europeanisation is inadequate – analysis of the internal processes of these countries and of their relations with the EU requests a more differentiated approach. Furthermore, Europeanisation concept is claimed one-sided as it pays no attention to domestic factors and places the EU at the top of hierarchy. To overcome these issues Börzel and Risse suggest another concept – diffusion. Diffusion is understood as proliferation of ideas, policies, norms and institutions over time and space.

Börzel and Risse distinguish two groups of mechanisms deployed in the process of diffusion: emulation and direct influence. The concept of Europeanisation uses the latter model, the main assumption of which is based on the passive role of the third countries: states adapt European institutions and norms as a cause of the EU regulations and policies. In this case the EU has four options of how to impact upon these states. The most severe among them is coercion, implying either the use of physical force or legal pressure. This mechanism is expected to be used only towards the Member States or accession candidates [12, 6]. The next tool consists of manipulative practices, in particular of positive and negative incentives such as capacity-building and conditionality. Capacity-building and conditionality are based on the arrangement where the EU provides financial assistance (or other incentives) to a third country and requests domestic institutional change. This tool is suitable for countries interested in strengthening economic ties with the EU. Apart

from these mechanisms, the EU uses socialization, where the Union is seen as a 'gigantic socialization agency', spreading its norms among the countries with aspiration for accession or domestic democratic change. Socialization is typically used together with other mechanisms. The last instrument of direct influence is persuasion. Mechanisms of persuasion become convenient when diffusion is aimed at countries outside the European space. With respect to these countries the EU has fewer 'carrots' to offer and therefore persuasion becomes the only possible tool.

The other set of tools – emulation – does not require the 'promoter' of norms and institutions in the face of the EU. A third country enters the process of diffusion independently by searching for institutional solutions. Börzel and Risse distinguish three mechanisms of emulation: competition, lesson-drawing, and mimicry. Competition describes the process when actors compete for the best economic and political performance and seek for the best institutional practices to suit this purpose. Lesson-drawing occurs when states seek institutions to resolve particular problems and look for the institutions that helped to manage a similar situation in another country. Both lesson-drawing and competition imply that states are led by functional logic, or logic of consequence. The third mechanism is formed by normative rationality: actors adopt institutions because they wish to belong to a community with the same institutional model. This instrument is often used to increase legitimacy on the international arena and is expected to be more widespread in regions where the EU is perceived as 'particularly legitimate' [12, 9].

The concept of diffusion was elaborated to fill the lacuna in the field by drawing more attention to domestic factors influencing the outcomes of the EU foreign policy. But what if we shift the focus of analysis from countries or

regions and look at other dimensions of the EU – third countries relations? Sandra Lavenex and Felix Schimmelfennig propose an approach, which concentrates on the systems of rules instead, thus shifting away from geopolitical analysis. They conceptualize the spread of the EU rules through the notion of 'external governance'. Governance is defined as "institutionalized forms of coordinated action that aim at the production of collectively binding agreements" [38, 795]. Lavenex and Schimmelfennig divide the types of external governance into three modes. The first institutional form is hierarchy. It concentrates on producing binding legal regulations and is the most formalized mode. The next form is network governance. Network governance ideally creates a relationship where actors act on equal terms under the less obliging environment. In such a system authority is replaced by 'negotiation systems'. The last mode that is distinguished is market governance. It places actors in the condition of autonomy and its main driving force becomes competition between them. High standards of production make actors seeking access to the market apply the rules needed to withstand competition [38].

As Lavenex and Schimmelfennig themselves underline, the distinction between horizontal and hierarchical modes of rule expansion is closely tied with Michael Smith's notion of 'boundaries of order' [38, 948]. Smith elaborates this concept to show the inclusion/exclusion distinction between the EU and the broader European order. Following this logic, the EU constructs boundaries between itself and its neighborhood in four ways: legal/institutional, geopolitical, transactional, and cultural. Legal boundary presents a set of restrictions connected to differences in institutional systems of the EU and other states. Geopolitical boundary is closely tied with the notions of stability and security. In order to ensure stability, the EU con-

structs a boundary between itself and the unstable outer order. This process is seen as a legacy of the Cold War era with its division between outsiders and insiders. The next type of boundary is transactional. This boundary includes regulations of the movement of goods, persons and capital and originates automatically with the establishment of a common economic market of the European states. The last type is a cultural boundary. The EU constructs this boundary by viewing its values as exceptional and inconsistency with these values may serve as a ground for portraying the 'outsiders' as a threat, which has its implications for political and economic spheres of interaction [45].

Smith's framework had a tangible impact on the development of the discussion about the conceptualization of the EU foreign policy. The concepts of diffusion and external governance discussed above are both to some extent based on the 'boundaries of order' framework. However, it is only useful for the analysis of actions of the EU – it does not allow us to explain the behavior of target-countries and this is the main disadvantage of this approach when it comes to a comprehensive research. Giselle Bosse and Elena Korosteleva in their article on the EU – Belarus relations contribute to the solution of this problem by extending the concept of 'boundaries of order' to include the capacity of the third countries to construct boundaries between themselves and the EU [11]. The process of inclusion/exclusion and boundaries construction thus becomes mutual. We will look at the application of their research more closely in the next section.

The last concept that warrants mentioning is linkage and leverage, proposed by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. It was developed to explain the international impact on the domestic regime change, or democratization. Both linkage and leverage are primarily applicable to Western – non-Western relations and are de-

defined as follows. Linkage is "the density of ties and cross-border flows between a particular country and the U.S., the EU, and western-dominated multilateral institutions" [39, 383]. Linkage is thought to generate 'soft power' as it converts international interests into domestic. Leverage is, in contrast, a 'hard power' tool and means "the degree to which governments are vulnerable to external democratizing pressure" [39, 379]. Practices of leverage include accession conditionality, punitive sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and military force. The effectiveness of leverage may be strengthened by linkage; however, linkage without leverage is not a sufficient condition for democratization [39].

The degrees of linkage and leverage in the EU – third countries relations may produce different character and outcomes of interaction. To review these and other possible effects we will now proceed to the next part of this section, where the impact of various factors will be reviewed.

FACTORS TO INFLUENCE THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE EU AND THIRD COUNTRIES

In this section we will distinguish two groups of factors which may influence the character of interaction in the EU – third countries' relations. In the first place we will observe external factors: geopolitical, economic and strategic, power-based, and structural factors. Then domestic factors of third countries will be examined. The division between external and domestic factors is based on perception of third countries as referent objects of distinction.

GEOPOLITICAL FACTORS

This set of factors points at the effect of geopolitical environment in which both sides are to act. Rationalist approach explanation suggests that if a country operates in a setting where an alternative to the EU dominance exists, the influence of the latter is expected to be

weaker. Regional powers, such as Russia in the case of post-Soviet space, may exert additional influence on third countries [16, 864-865]. If a strong regional actor offers economic, military, or diplomatic support to these countries, the EU's leverage becomes limited [39, 383]. The concept of external governance suggests that the hierarchical rule transfer is only possible if a third country is more dependent on the EU than on other 'governance providers' and this dependency is deep [38, 803]. From the constructivist perspective, interaction may be affected by mutual building of boundaries. Because strategic considerations may influence formation of interests, a shift in geopolitical boundaries may be the consequence of change in strategic interests of a third country or the EU. A good example of this effect may be found in the EU - Belarus relations. Russian natural resources serve as fuel not only in a conventional sense, but also for Lukashenko's legitimacy which was built on high social expenditures. As a response to Russia's gas and oil price changes in 2002, 2004 and 2006, which presented a possible threat to the regime, the Belarusian government sought aid from the EU, thus, shifting its boundaries towards rapprochement with the West [11, 156].

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Economy plays a crucial role in the formation of interaction between the EU and neighboring countries. On the one hand, economic capacity of a third country may alter the policy of the EU towards it, influencing the use of mechanisms of governance and diffusion. Thus, if the EU has strategic or economic interests on the line, consistency of norm diffusion process may be spoiled [12, 13]. The concept of leverage predicts similar effects: in countries, which present economic interest for the EU or other Western powers, the governments may gain a shield from external democratizing pressure [39, 383].

On the other hand, the EU may construct additional transactional boundaries to enforce domestic change as it does in the case of Belarus: for example, by withdrawing the Generalized System of Preferences in 2007 [11, 152]. Such construction becomes especially salient in case if strong linkages are present, as they can produce additional sources of antiauthoritarian pressure. First, it makes autocratic abuse more noticeable in the international community. Consequently, the chance of the EU taking action in response to these abuses becomes more probable [39, 379].

POWER-BASED FACTORS

This set of factors uses power as an explanatory tool for changing character of interaction between the EU and third countries. It is focused on power structures, which shape the behavior of actors, and involves the concepts of 'bargaining power' and power asymmetries. 'Bargaining power' can be defined as "the stronger or the weaker position that an actor manages to obtain in the policy-making process" [28, 393]. In the context of accession conditionality, the EU's bargaining power is very strong, but in the absence of such an incentive it becomes substantially weaker [38, 803]. Third countries, in their turn, can increase their bargaining power if the EU's economic or strategic interests are present, as in the case of the EU - Azerbaijan interaction. Power asymmetries explanation follows the similar logic. The degree of interdependence affects both the EU's capability to exert pressure and the power of a third country to resist such pressure [12, 13]. As Azerbaijan sees the EU at the 'receiving end' [27, 163], and the EU self-censors its democratizing pressure, the relationship may be classified as asymmetrical. Due to that, Azerbaijan's bargaining power becomes strong, allowing the country to prevent possible coercion and maintain suitable rules of the game.

DOMESTIC FACTORS

For the more complete research it is important to include internal conditions of third countries in the analysis. Such factors as domestic incentives and willingness to cooperate may explain how interaction is formed from the point of view of partner-countries. One of the scope conditions for institutional change, distinguished by Börzel and Risse, is domestic incentives. This condition explains why authoritarian regimes may sometimes adopt European institutions. Such behavior may occur if the adoption of institutions can be used to consolidate power or push interests of elites, or, in other words, if it is suitable for the 'survival strategy' of a regime [12, 11]. In the article on the EU's relations with the ENP countries written by Anja Franke et al., willingness to cooperate, asymmetric interdependence and adaptation costs are listed as factors influencing the success of any EU strategy.

The approach used by Franke et al. implies that actions of an ENP country may be explained by cost-benefit calculation, normative logic, or path dependence. Rationalist explanation assumes that a partner-country calculates net benefits from cooperation with the EU and its further actions may be led by two strategies: securing rewards or avoiding punishment. In countries rich in natural resources, as Azerbaijan, governments may show 'resource-based reluctance' to cooperate. Willingness to cooperate may also be influenced by the level of asymmetrical dependence of a partner country on relations with the EU. The higher this level is, the more important rewards will be. Normative willingness may be fueled by the desire of a country to be a part of the European community. From the historical neo-institutionalism perspective, adaptation costs are understood as costs "linked to the continuation of path dependent, persisting Soviet-era mentalities and a particular type of incumbent regime in an ENP

partner-country" [27, 155]. The higher the level of path dependence is, the higher adaptation costs will be. This is the case for all EaP countries, which used to be Soviet republics [27].

Another factor is cultural boundaries, which may be constructed by countries based on cultural and normative differences between themselves and the EU. An example of such construction is Russian discourse on 'special values'. In Belarus the similar rhetoric was employed to create a cultural boundary with the EU. The state-controlled media purposely reduces coverage on European issues and underlines the differences in values between Belarus and the EU, hindering the possibility of approximation [11], [35, 15].

Another group of domestic factors deals with legal and institutional conditions. Variance in legal and institutional domestic orders may create a difficulty when it comes to compliance with the EU demands. 'EU compatibility' of domestic institutions becomes a significant factor influencing the adoption of the EU rules [38] – this factor resonates with adaptation costs explanation. Such 'mismatch' in legal orders of Belarus and the EU may be found in Belarus' treaties with Russia – for example, Customs Union, which excludes the possibility of establishment of a Free Trade Area with the EU [11, 153].

After having distinguished four groups of factors which affect the EU – third countries interaction we proceed to the formulation of expectations for the EU relations with Azerbaijan and Belarus based on the literature.

EU-AZERBAIJAN AND EU-BELARUS RELATIONS

In the previous section we have partially covered some of the issues connected to the EU's relations with Azerbaijan and Belarus. Now, drawing on the theoretical literature, we will first look at the expectations for the EU –

Belarus and EU – Azerbaijan interaction. With the use of empirical literature, we will outline the discrepancies in the observed interaction, thus justifying our research question.

As it was mentioned in the introduction, Azerbaijan and Belarus are quite similar in terms of political regime and historical background. Both states are classified as authoritarian and share Soviet legacy. ‘Persisting Soviet-era mentalities’ [27] increase adaptation costs for the regimes to comply with the EU demands and therefore place limits on the EU governance. That is why we expect that the EU rules adoption in these countries will meet resistance from the elites due to the threat to regime stability. This assumption finds its reflection in the reality: Azerbaijan and Belarus resist the EU’s pressure for democratization, but to a different extent. Moreover, in both Azerbaijan and Belarus the EU linkages are either weak, as in the case of Belarus [39, 384], or undiversified, as in the case of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan’s linkages to the EU are weak in all spheres apart from a strong economic linkage. According to Gwendolyn Sasse, such deep and homogenous linkages have a negative impact on democracy promotion [43, 580]. At the same time, Belarus – EU relations are characterized by low linkage in all spheres. Therefore, we would expect little antiauthoritarian pressure. However, demands from the EU for a democratic change in Belarus remain intensive [11], [43].

Empirical literature distinguishes Azerbaijan and Belarus as actors which seek a more differentiated policy and are ready to participate in the initiative only on equal terms [28], [27], [35], [44]. Another expectation is based on the assumption that in countries which lack the capacity to participate on equal terms and where network governance is used to substitute the lack of leverage, the character of interaction becomes asymmetric with the EU in a dominant position [37, 946]. Relations of the EU with

Azerbaijan and Belarus may indeed be characterized by low leverage. Then, conditionality is replaced by mechanisms of persuasion and the network governance becomes the only possible option. Asymmetries are expected to emerge because the EU does not accept Azerbaijan and Belarus as equal partners, but rather as governance objects [35, 10]. Following the theoretical assumption, such position would lead to the EU’s dominance in the interaction. But is it always the case? A research on Azerbaijan’s ‘bargaining power’ conducted by Elke van Gils shows the opposite – Azerbaijan seems to dominate in its relationship with the EU. Positioning itself as a strong regional actor Azerbaijan seeks a differentiated policy and challenges the EU’s demands for democracy and human rights. To achieve these goals Azerbaijan uses tools ranging from lobbying in Brussels to alluring domestic NGO’s from cooperation with the EU by providing them with additional governmental financial assistance, thus successfully avoiding cooperation in the sphere of human rights and democracy promotion [28]. The effectiveness of the EU governance in Belarus has also been in question. One of the economic sanctioning instruments that the EU used towards Belarus was the withdrawal of GSP in 2007. However, this measure affected only 10% of Belarusian exports and did not lead to intended results, therefore the success of EU sanctioning in Belarus is disputed [11, 153].

Because the EU has little to offer these partner-states, willingness to cooperate is low in both cases [13, 136], [27]. Where membership is not the main goal of partnership, the EU ‘bargaining power’ becomes weak [38], which is true for both Azerbaijan and Belarus. Partners try to de-politicize interaction, focusing on technical and economic cooperation. In the case of the EU – Azerbaijan relations, both sides have embraced pragmatic vision of cooperation [43]. The problem which Belarus faces is that it

must prioritize the relations with either Russia or the EU, being trapped between two strong players [35, 14], [42, 74]. As a result, Belarus uses the EU as a bargaining chip in its relations with Russia, giving preference to the latter [11]. Despite the lack of strong incentives to obey in cases of both Belarus and Azerbaijan, the EU continues to use sanctions towards the former only.

Why is our research important? Several works underline the discrepancy in the EU's foreign policy towards Belarus and Azerbaijan [29, 35]. However, none of them put these cases together to explore the causes of the differences from a comparative perspective. We think that it is important to compare the development of patterns of interaction between the EU and these partner-countries in order to solve the puzzle presented by the cases.

Considering the differences between expected and real interaction, we pose the following question: why does the interaction between the EU and Azerbaijan differ from the interaction between the EU and Belarus? In our study we will look at the factors which affect both the actions of the EU towards Azerbaijan and Belarus and the responses of these countries to the EU's actions.

OPERATIONALIZATION AND THE "MENU OF INTERACTION"

The core idea used in our research is that of patterns of interaction. Interaction may be approached from rationalist and constructivist perspectives. The former implies that actors are led by the calculation of benefits and their interests are exogenous to interaction. In other words, actors enter the process of interaction with pre-formed interests and act in accordance with rational cost-benefit calculation logic. In this case the focus would be on self-interest, ca-

pacities, resources, and power. Constructivist approach, conversely, suggests that interests are shaped in the process of interaction. Apart from interest creation, this perspective offers a view on formation of patterns. Thus, following this approach, Korosteleva et al. develop a theoretical framework for the analysis of eastern dimension of the ENP through practices perspective. Practices are understood as "socially meaningful patterns of action" [36, 259] which through interaction form social structures. Social structures, in turn, are "regulated patterns of competent interactions bound by agreed rules and norms" [36, 261]. An important aspect of social structures is that they are constructed through interaction by being both performed and interpreted. Various policy instruments of the EU are treated both as practices, or patterns of governance, and as social structures [36]. Thus, regulated patterns of interaction are formed by orderly occurrences of practices.

Drawing on this model we develop the understanding of patterns of interaction as performed and interpreted practices of actors in the form of policy instruments, economic and declaratory actions. We believe that interaction is affected by actions of both actors and their interests change in the process. Nevertheless, rationalist perspective is not excluded from our analysis and will be used to formulate hypotheses.

To assess the interaction between the EU and EaP partner-countries we elaborate a 'menu of interaction', which contains five sets of possible actions of the EU towards partner-countries. Each set may be laid on the continuum from 'extremely negative' and 'negative' to 'extremely positive'. In between lay 'neutral' and 'positive' types of actions. We also provide examples of possible strategies of behavior for partner-countries.

Table 1. Patterns of interaction.

The EU						Partner-country	
	Extremely negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Extremely positive	Positive	Negative
Economic	Sanctions (embargo)	Sanctions	Trade	ENPI-financing EaP funds GSP			Reducing trade with the EU
Declaratory	'Public shaming' in official documents and public statements Targeted sanctions	Negative assessment in Progress Reports	Moderate assessment in Progress Reports Neutral statements	Positive assessment Positive statements		Release of political prisoners	Withdrawal from international organizations and the EU initiatives;
Procedural	Sanctions (for example, suspension of membership in organizations)	Sanctions	Meetings in councils and committees twinning	Visa facilitation TACIS FTA TEMPUS	Accession agreement		Refusal to negotiate over an agreement

We divide interaction into three groups: procedural, economic, and declaratory. Procedural interaction includes institutionalized forms such as diplomatic instruments, agreements, initiatives, and platforms (based on Whitman's (1979) classification of policy instruments provided here: [35]). Economic interaction contains financial assistance, trade, and negative economic sanctions. Finally, declaratory interaction embraces public statements of officials, documents, Progress Reports on Action Plans, and other forms of manifestations. Signaling actions such as release of political prisoners are also considered to be the part of declaratory interaction.

Hypotheses. To solve the puzzle presented by the cases of Azerbaijan and Belarus we will formulate several hypotheses. Building on the three neo-institutionalisms distinguished by Hall and Taylor [31] we develop three possible explanations:

Rational choice institutionalism

1. Countries which do not possess a 'back up' in form of natural resources are likely to meet coercive measures from the EU;

Conversely, where the EU's strategic or economic interest is present, pressure would not occur.

Sociological neo-institutionalism

2. Countries which the EU considers as being normatively close to 'European' world would experience more pressure for domestic change;

While Belarus is seen as a part of Europe, Azerbaijan does not belong to the EU's 'hemisphere'. This may explain the application of sanctions toward the closest neighbor.

Historical neo-institutionalism

3. The pattern of the use of sanctions by the EU is path-dependent: once sanctions are

introduced the EU is unlikely to suspend them even if they do not have the intended effect.

The pattern of the use of sanctions by the EU shows that once it has resorted to that instrument, the Union is unlikely to step aside. As a normative actor [40], the EU is interested in maintaining the existing image. In the case of Azerbaijan, where the EU has economic interests at stake, the Union would not want to put at risk both the interests, as the sanctions would worsen the relations with the country, and the image of a normative actor, if the EU would decide to lift the sanctions. Due to the Azerbaijan's recognition and active use of its 'bargaining power', the EU understands the stance of its partner-country and does not impose sanctions.

CASES OF AZERBAIJAN AND BELARUS

In this section we proceed to the cases of Azerbaijan – EU and Belarus – EU interaction in the framework of EaP. We will look at the interaction in three fields: procedural, declaratory and economic and will test our hypotheses on the empirical data.

PROCEDURAL INTERACTION

Belarus. Procedural interaction between the EU and Belarus is extremely limited compared to other EaP-countries. From the very beginning, Belarus's relations with the EU were characterized by imposition of sanctions, exclusions from international organizations, and blurred legal framework for partnership. The main document which used to serve as a basis for the relations between the EU and third countries is Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). The PCA with Belarus was signed in 1995, but shortly after the EU suspended its ratification [26]. With the launch of EaP, PCAs are being replaced by Association Agreements (AA), but with Belarus there is still no progress in signing an AA. Due to this, Belarus remains the only partner which does not fully participate in a bilateral track of the EaP.

The EU's policy towards Minsk is aimed at reducing suffering of the population by strengthening people-to-people contacts and at the same time it seeks to promote democratic change. To diffuse its norms and regulations the EU exercises tools of manipulation, namely targeted sanctions, against Belarusian authorities, and socialization – by engaging with Belarusian population through low-level initiatives. The EU calls its position towards Belarus "policy of critical engagement" [24]. Such approach to cooperation places serious limitations on Belarus's interaction with the EU. Due to the EU's condemnations of non-democratic regime and human rights violations in Belarus, it was not accepted to the Council of Europe. At the same time, poor human rights record did not prevent Azerbaijan from becoming a full member of this organization. Moreover, following the deeply flawed Presidential elections in 2010, Belarus's membership in Euronest Parliamentary Assembly was suspended.

One of the remaining channels of procedural interaction is participation in biannual EaP Summits, where most of agreements between the EU and partner-countries are signed. First Summit in Prague laid out the foundation for the further cooperation in the framework of EaP, where the Joint Declaration was signed. The next Summit was ignored by Belarus, putting in doubt its future participation in the initiative.

Nevertheless, in 2014 the EU and Belarus started negotiation over visa facilitation and readmission agreements (VFA/RA). Notably, it happened only three years after the EU's first invitation to start visa facilitation process. In this period the EU constantly expressed regret about the absence of response from the Belarusian authorities [23]. Next year the parties met at the Riga Summit, where the progress in VFA/RA negotiations was noted. In 2016 the Mobility Partnership was signed, while

VFA/RA were still in the process of negotiations. At the same time these agreements with Azerbaijan were signed already in 2013.

The slow progress in negotiations with Belarus may be explained by the construction of transactional boundaries by the Belarusian government. Lukashenko is regularly by the EP for hindering the movement of Belarusian citizens. To overcome this issue and increase people-to-people contacts the Council of the EU offered the Member-States to reduce visa fees unilaterally [15]. However, visa fees for Belarusians remained at the highest level [33].

Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's relations with the EU are regulated by the PCA signed in 1999 and by the Action Plan adopted in 2006. Nowadays the parties are in the process of negotiations over the new agreement.

After Azerbaijan joined the EaP initiative negotiations over a new Association Agreement started. The aim of this kind of agreements was to outline "a plan of reforms that will bring the partner countries closer to the EU by aligning their legislation and standards to the EU ones" [17]. Azerbaijan constantly impeded the adoption of the agreement because compliance with the EU norms was not in the interest of Azerbaijani authorities. As a result, the process lasted for several years until the Azerbaijani side suggested a draft for a "strategic partnership agreement" with the EU during the EaP summit in Riga, which was the first time when a third country proposed a draft to the EU [30]. Azerbaijan clearly positions itself as a strong player which may be explained if we look at the economic interaction.

In July 2015 the OSCE office in Baku closes after the Azerbaijani authorities suspend the Memorandum of Understanding with the OSCE. Following this, in September 2015 the European Parliament issue a resolution condemning suppression of independent journal-

ists and human rights activists by the Azerbaijani government. The EU urged Azerbaijan to release all political prisoners, stressing, that if the government of Azerbaijan does not take steps to change the situation with human rights in the country, the negotiations for a Strategic Partnership Agreement would be delayed [34]. Several days after the resolution was passed the Azerbaijani Parliament decided to withdraw from Euronest [5]. In response The EU expressed regret and gave the Azerbaijani side a year until the start of withdrawal process [55]. A year later the Parliament of Azerbaijan passed a resolution on restoration of relations with European Parliament [4].

ECONOMIC INTERACTION

Belarus. The EU is the second main economic partner of Belarus after Russia, constituting one third of its trade. However, compared to the EU – Azerbaijan trade, Belarus's interaction with the EU in this sphere is relatively low. Imports from the EU exceed exports to the Union by almost 50 percent. The EU's transactional restrictions added to the reduction of Belarusian imports by the withdrawal of the GSP from Belarus in 2007, and by applying additional import quotas covering textile trade in 2010 [10].

Azerbaijan. The EU constitutes almost the half of Azerbaijani trade, accounting for approximately 48,6 percent. 60.7 percent of Azerbaijani exports go to the EU. In trade with Azerbaijan EU imports significantly overweigh EU exports: in 2016 Azerbaijan's exports to the EU amounted to €7,610, which is almost four times more than its imports from the EU. The Union's imports from Azerbaijan consist mostly of mineral fuels. Petroleum imports accounted for €14,202 million in 2013, declining gradually each year and reaching half the value in 2016 [19]. These figures show a high level of the EU's dependence on Azerbaijan's exports. Among EaP-partners such level of interdependence

may be registered only in the EU's relations with Ukraine: however, with Ukraine in a receiving position [20].

Our first hypothesis suggests that countries which are rich in natural resources would not meet resistance from the EU. Azerbaijan's oil exports to the EU constitute an important source of diversification of the EU's energy supply. The empirical data shows the EU's dependence on Azerbaijani fuels and its transit capacity. As for Belarus, its relations with the EU are not characterized by high level of cooperation, which allows the EU to exert pressure, not being afraid of losing a strategically crucial partner. Thus, we may conclude that the economic interest of the EU in Azerbaijan prevents it from imposing sanctions.

DECLARATORY INTERACTION

Belarus. Between 2004 and 2016 the European Parliament issued dozens of resolutions concerning the situation in Belarus. Few of them were given an official response. In resolutions issued in 2005 the EP openly calls Belarusian regime dictatorial and urges the Council to condemn "President Lukashenko as a dictator" [47]. Response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus was harshly worded: "the European Parliament is engaged in stamping documents that are full of distortions of facts, on-call charges and dubious statements". In one of the resolutions from the EP urges the Council and Commission to "raise the issue of Belarus with the Russian authorities", which Belarus considers to be on the verge of "direct interference in the affairs of a sovereign state" [14].

In 2011 Belarus decided to boycott the EaP Summit in Warsaw, because the invitation was issued for the Belarusian foreign minister Serhiy Martynau and not for Lukashenko [9]. In response, Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs delivered a statement calling such measures "discriminatory" and underlined Belarus's will-

ingness to cooperate only on the terms of "real, not imaginary, partnership" [46]. After the Summit the President of the European Commission emphasized the EU's position on Belarus: "we all share the same goal, that of a democratic and free Belarus" [25]. Following the release of all political prisoners in August 2015, the EU lifted the majority of sanctions [7].

Our second hypothesis assumes that the EU's actions towards Belarus may be explained by proximity of the latter to Europe. Empirics show that the rhetoric of 'Belarus as a part of Europe' is indeed used in official EU discourse in both geographical and normative sense. Belarus is called "the last dictatorship in Europe" [51], "the only European country not yet linked to the EU" [52], its location is underlined in the statements saying that Belarus is "at the crossroads of Europe" and has "the potential to connect East and West and North and South" [21] and that human rights violations should not occur in the country which is "a direct neighbor of the EU" [53]. Other statements imply Belarus's normative closeness to Europe: death penalty is called incompatible with "European values" [54], and for political prisoners there is "no space in Europe" [22].

Azerbaijan. European Parliament and the Council of the EU issue resolutions and conclusions condemning the situation in Azerbaijan, but far less frequently than in the case of Belarus. One example will suffice to understand the extent of this difference.

In 2005 Human Rights Watch reported a lamentable situation with respect to human rights in Azerbaijan. The same year the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in the world. It covered a wide range of regions and countries from Saudi Arabia to Ukraine, but remarkably, there was no mention of Azerbaijan; same happened to the consequent resolutions issued before 2009.

After Azerbaijan joined the EaP, the EU felt the need to address the issue of human rights, being one of the core values of the EU and the EaP, at least discursively. Few EP resolutions were adopted to condemn oppression of journalists and activists, and one of the most recent ones elicited a strong response from Baku. As it was already mentioned, in 2015 Azerbaijani Parliament declared about its withdrawal from Euronest. Furthermore, in response to the EU's demand for release of political prisoners, Azerbaijani government sentences even more activists [44]. Knowing that partnership with Baku is strategically important for the EU, Azerbaijan used its bargaining power to resist EU's normative demands.

Azerbaijan builds a democratic façade by participating in various committees and platforms on human rights, thus legitimizing EU's compromising approach. The EU accepts rules of this game and does not introduce sanctions. According to the third hypothesis, we argue that the EU does not resort to sanctions because the use of that means is path-dependent. The case of Belarus shows that the EU does not step back until the requirements are fulfilled. Taking into consideration the EU's dependence on Azeri oil, we may suggest that in the case of Azerbaijan the EU does not want to repeat the scenario which happened during the Second Chechen War in Russia, when the EU had to lift sanctions shortly after their introduction [32].

The EU may have resorted to sanctions in 2015, following the fraudulent elections and repression of the opposition. However, having met resistance from Azerbaijan after the adoption of the resolution, the EU opted to preserve status-quo in its relations with economically important partner.

CONCLUSION

In this study we have traced the interaction between the EU and Azerbaijan and the EU

and Belarus between 2009 and 2016 in procedural, declaratory and economic fields and tested the hypotheses set in the theoretical part of the paper. We came to the following conclusions.

Firstly, the EU indeed does not exert pressure where its economic interest is present. The reason is that such interest gives the third country power to resist democratizing pressure. Empirical data proved that Azerbaijan has a 'back up' in the form of natural resources, which allows it to avoid cooperation in the normative field.

Secondly, Belarus's vicinity to Europe is often used in the EU's argumentation of its demands for a democratic change. Belarus is claimed to be a part of Europe – and this is given as a reason why it should comply with the European rules. Thus, the imposition of sanctions may be explained by this logic.

Thirdly, the imposition of sanctions on Azerbaijan is restricted by the EU's path-dependent character of sanctioning, which we observed in the case of Belarus. Once the EU has resorted to that measure, it cannot cancel it, because it would damage its normative image. As Azerbaijan is economically important for the EU and unlikely to conform, the EU chooses not to impose restrictive measures.

For further research it would be useful to test these hypotheses on a bigger number of cases to include all ENP-countries.

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ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ПАТТЕРНОВ ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ ЕС И ГОСУДАРСТВ-УЧАСТНИКОВ ПОЛИТИКИ ВОСТОЧНОГО ПАРТНЕРСТВА В ПЕРИОД 2009-2016: КЕЙСЫ БЕЛАРУСИ И АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА

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Данная работа нацелена на исследование взаимодействия ЕС с двумя государствами, участвующими в инициативе Восточного Партнерства: Азербайджаном и Беларусью. Несмотря на схожие характеристики, взаимодействие этих стран с Европейским Союзом значительно различается. В ходе работы рассматривается формирование паттернов взаимодействия и формулируются ответы на вопрос о причинах различий во взаимодействии данных стран с ЕС.

Ключевые слова:

Восточное Партнерство, внешняя политика ЕС, постсоветское пространство, европеизация.